Trails and Tales of Old Austin and Travis County: What's Up with Jollyville Road?

This is an expanded post of my history article for the August 2018 issue of the Northwest Austin Civic Association (NWACA) newsletter (http://nwaca.org/newsletter/).

If you are new to Northwest Hills, you may have noticed an odd little section of road, less than a mile long, on the northeast edge of the neighborhood that doesn't really seem to go anywhere. I'm talking about Jollyville Road. Drive north on Mesa Drive and it dead ends at Jollyville Road. Even if you've been around Austin a while and are familiar with the "other" Jollyville Road north of the Arboretum, you might wonder what that road has do with the segment in our neighborhood. In fact, new or old to Austin, you may be thinking, "Now that you've brought it up, what's up with Jollyville Road in general?!"

Jollyville Road is an old road from when roads were named for their destination, in this case the road from Austin to Jollyville, Texas. The small segment on the edge of our neighborhood is a remnant of what was a much longer road. But let's start at the beginning. Literally.

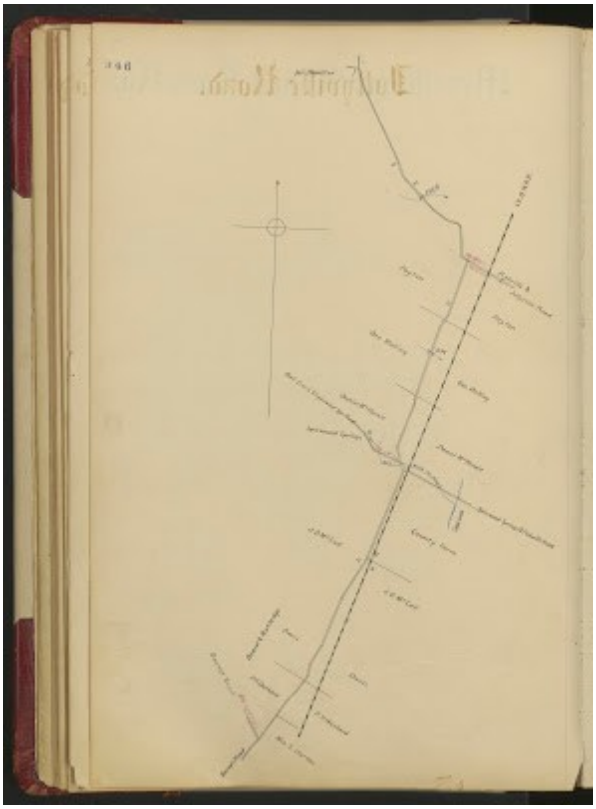
County road records from 1898-1902 give us the starting location for the old Jollyville Road[1]. In terms of today's landscape, it began at roughly the intersection of today's Balcones Drive and FM 2222. From there it ran north following today's Balcones Drive, Mopac Service Road (one way today, going the wrong direction!) crossing Spicewood Springs Road, connecting with the small segment of Jollyville Road in our neighborhood, crossing Loop 360 connecting with Jollyville Road north of the Arboretum, and on to the community of Jollyville, Texas.

On Google Maps you can search for "Jollyville, Texas", but you'll get a location too far east of where the old road was headed. To get a true sense of the original location you need to go to the old road maps, or better yet, simply search for the "Jollyville Cemetery". It's easy enough to move the names of towns on a map; it's much harder to move a cemetery! The Jollyville Cemetery is located close to where Jollyville Road terminates at US 183. This is the location of old Jollyville.

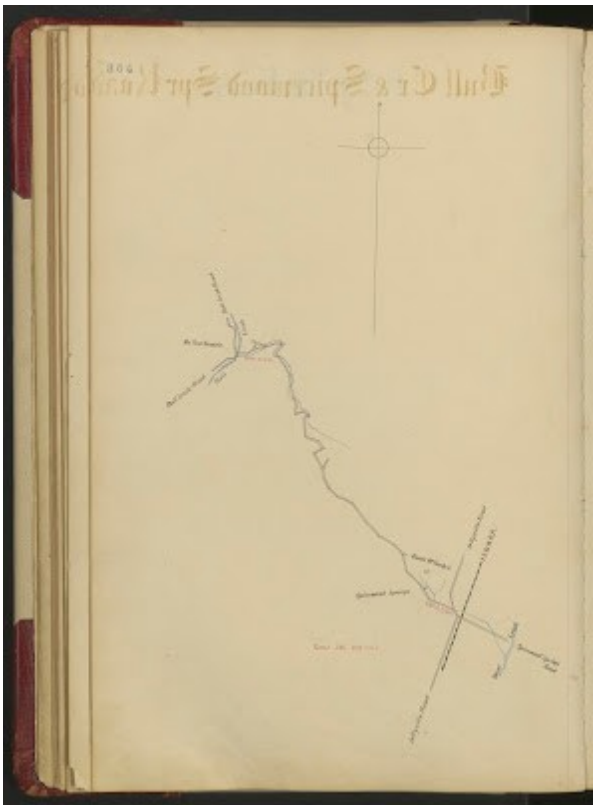
Settlement in the area started in the 1840s; this was on the route to Fort Croghan and Hamilton Valley, renamed Burnet, TX in 1858. Jollyville was later established by John Grey Jolly in 1866. He owned a store and blacksmith shop. In 1878 residents built a school on land donated by Jolly that had thirty-five pupils in 1903 at which time it was merged with nearby Pond Springs School. Jolly also donated the land for Jolly Cemetery. The first burial was 1872, the last 1929. Both Jolly and his wife are buried there, as well as five citizens of the Republic of Texas. Jollyville served as a stop on the Austin to Burnet stage line until it closed in 1883 with the arrival of the railroad. The Handbook of Texas gives information on the population over the years: "In 1940 the community had forty inhabitants and two businesses ... [by] 1990 its population was 15,206, and the town had expanded into Travis County."

Photos of the old one room Jolly log cabin, home of the namesake of Jollyville, are on file at the Austin History Center. The cabin is said to have been located near the intersection of US 183 and Spicewood Springs Road / McNeil Road, a scant 2,000 plus feet from the cemetery [2]. Luckily the cabin is still in existence, moved to Pioneer Farms in 2013 to prevent its demolition. Road trip!

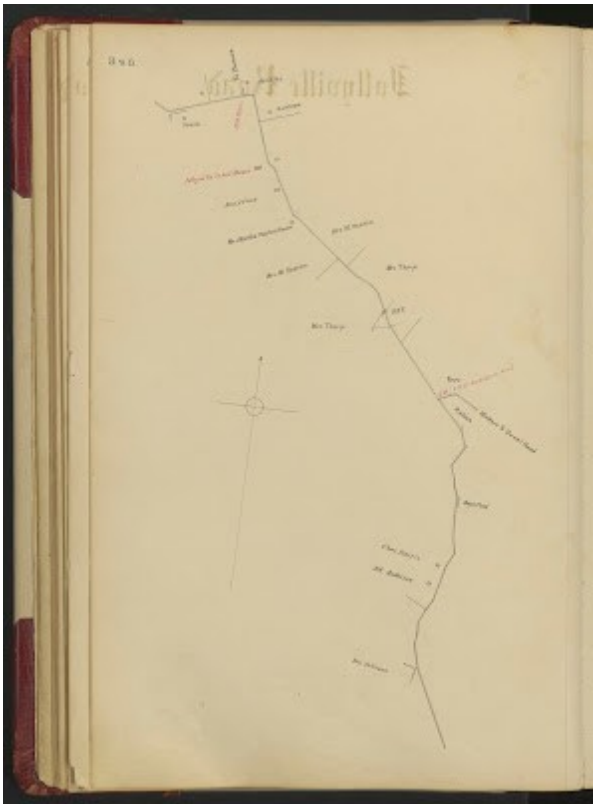
Photos



Map of Jollyville Road map #1, start, Travis County Clerk Records



Map of Jollyville Road map #2, crossing Spicewood Springs Rd, Travis County Clerk Records

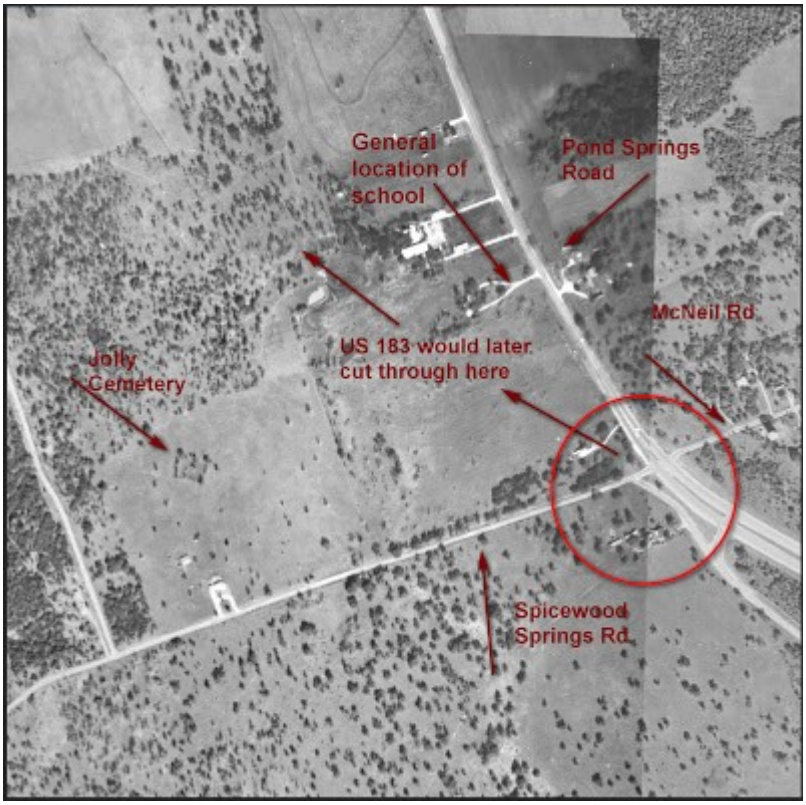


Map of Jollyville Road map #3, arriving at Jollyville, Travis County Clerk Records. Notice on the map that Jollyville, TX and the cemetery are west of Jollyville Road. Notice also at the top of the map it says "to Burnet".

Jolly Cabin at original location, Austin History Center photo, PICA_34304

Jolly Cabin today at Pioneer Farms. Notice chimney is missing.

Plaque on Jolly Cabin at Pioneer Farms



1964 aerial (Historic Aerials.com) showing Jolly Cemetery as it was. Photo is prior to extension of US 183. Circle shows intersection of current US 183 and Spicewood Springs Rd / McNeil Rd where cabin was said to have been located.

Footnotes

[1] Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, pp. 346-354 says, “Beginning on the Burnet Road at the SE cor[ner] of Beard and Rutledge [properties] on west line of Mrs. S. M. Harlan [property] at a point marked O on page 263, 4 miles and 1347 [varas, ~.7 miles] from the intersection of Guadalupe and 19th street”. Yep, FM 2222 used to be called Burnet Road, one of two roads to Burnet, Texas. Nope, Burnet Road is not named for David G. Burnet, ad interim president of the Republic of Texas in 1836. Remnants of this old route to Burnet are still around. On Google Maps search for “Old Burnet Rd Texas 78645” to see a segment that ran by Sandy Creek on Lake Travis en route to Burnet, TX.

[2] The description on the back of the photos says, "On Burnet Hwy at corner old Spicewood Springs Road”. That “Burnet Road” is again a road describing where it goes, i.e. Burnet, TX, and corresponds to today’s US 183. Burnet Road is an excellent example of the flaws in naming roads for their destinations; in this case, both FM 2222 and US 183 were roads to Burnet, TX, and at various times on various maps both appear as “Burnet Road”.

Sources

Handbook of Texas, JOLLYVILLE, TX (https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hlj10)

Williamson County Historical Commission, Jollyville Cemetery history (http://www.williamson-county-historical-commission.org/Jollyville_texas/Jolly_Cemetery_and_Historical_Maker_Jollyville_Williamson_County_Texas.html)

Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, pp. 346-354

The Historical Marker Database, Jolly Cemetery (https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=25504)

The Historical Marker Database, Jollyville Community and School (https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=119231)